



Passport to your future

# Kevin's Story

## Kevin is presently working at Ham House & Garden

**I have, since I can remember, loved history. When I applied for the PTYF traineeship in February 2013, my life was very different to how it has become.**

I was in a very different place. I was unemployed, approaching 50 years of age and starting to feel pretty useless because I had been signing on for very nearly six months with only two unsuccessful interviews to show for it. I possessed no academic qualifications and had always worked in the manual type of job.

When I saw the position advertised on the Job Seekers website, I immediately told myself that I didn't stand a chance of getting this post; it would go to someone younger than me or someone more qualified or to someone better than me! I thought that I would apply for the job anyway just to keep the Job Centre happy.

To cut a long story short, after two interviews and a period of waiting (despondently) I was overjoyed and speechless when I was offered the role as PTYF trainee for Ham House and Garden. I have grown up in Richmond and Ham and loved Ham House since my brother and myself used to play as children on the grounds, which in those days were not as well kept as they are now.

### My Background

I would not have even considered applying for this sort of job then because I was a full time drinker; this sort of occupation gets in the way of everything in your life, work, family, relationships - you name it. So before it killed me I saw the light and got help and stopped. I've been sober for fifteen years.

### My first day at Ham

My first day was 13 May 2013 and was immediately equipped with a specialised vacuum cleaner and some brushes and set to work shadowing a Conservator called Norma. She very patiently showed me how to clean different surfaces with the various brushes (hogs hair for carved wood, pony hair for lacquered surfaces) and how to hold the vacuum nozzle to catch all the dust particles. I soon fell into the fascinating world of cleaning and conserving historic objects and, as I love anything to do with history found me as happy as a pig in the proverbial.

As I have said, history has always been a real love of mine, so learning about the property I am working in is not a chore. After a couple of weeks being eased into the routines of housekeeping and working with some fabulous volunteers (from whom you can learn an awful lot) I was sent on a three day course to the

National Trusts Head office at Swindon in Wiltshire. Called Heelis, the building is a very impressive hi-tech structure, totally green and ergonomic, staffed by friendly and informal, yet professional people. To be honest, I found it all quite intimidating because suddenly I was in an academic atmosphere with books, files, computers and National Trust experts and I felt way out of my depth.

Soon though, I realised that I needn't have worried because the people who were teaching us the various areas of conservation obviously enjoyed passing their knowledge on to others and they were only too pleased to help if I found myself stuck on something (especially CMS).

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### What I have learnt:

1. How to clean different surfaces with the various brushes (hogs hair for carved wood, pony hair for lacquered surfaces) and how to hold the vacuum nozzle to catch all the dust particles.
2. I was eased into the routines of housekeeping and working with some fabulous volunteers (from whom you can learn an awful lot) I was sent on a three day course to the National Trusts Head office at Swindon in Wiltshire.
3. I learnt Project Management. The trainee plans and implements a project that will benefit the Trust. This could be a range of things, from Visitor Experience to cataloguing certain objects on the Trust Collection Management System or a children's workshop or setting up an exhibition. My project is going to be cataloguing Ham Houses large collection of metal objects which will need researching and then will be given their own inventory number.



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## Meeting new people

I also found some new friends on the course. There were six other people who the Trust had taken on for the passport year, who, like me had a real passion and love of history, which was a real icebreaker. Sharing a passion for something is like having a common bond together so there was always someone there to support you and chat to. Each evening we would all meet up with each other for a meal and discuss the day at Heelis, it was a very good way of getting to know everyone. The PTYF coordinator, Claire Poulton was also with us for the three days so we all felt very well looked after.

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## What is involved in PTYF?

One of the main parts of the Passport year is Project Management. This is when the trainee plans and implements a project that will benefit the Trust. This

could be a range of things, from Visitor Experience to cataloguing certain objects on the Trust Collection Management System or a children's workshop or setting up an exhibition.

My project is going to be cataloguing Ham Houses large collection of metal objects which will need researching and then will be given their own inventory number. Again, to someone who is fascinated by anything old or historical, this should keep me happily busy for a while.

The next course came up a few weeks later and this time was held at Lyme Park in Cheshire. We had all been told that this was a far more involved and intense course and they weren't kidding! An awful lot of subjects were covered in two days, housekeeping, wooden furniture, metals, ceramics; I haven't taken notes like that since I was at school. I must stress though, it was all so interesting-every subject.

Again, it was really good to see all the friends I had made on the course at Heelis and to see how we have all got on. I think we have all grown.

## How PTYF has benefited me

The National Trust has achieved a good thing with the Passport to Your Future Year. In my case I was an out of work decorator with no prospects and resigned to a pretty bleak future in my profession and here I am now already feeling more confident about myself and far, far happier in my work. A part of this course is also about Personal Development and I really believe I have changed my outlook for the better.

On closing I would like to thank all the staff at Ham who have made me feel welcome and who show me patience and support; Gwen, my very energetic and capable Line Manager, Camilla and Sarah, assistant house stewards and my mentors and buddies Norma, Tracey, Abby and Lucy.

Bring on the rest of the year; I don't think I'll forget it.



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